

Report to	Council
Date of meeting	28 January 2025
Lead Member	Councillor Julie Matthews, Lead Member for Corporate Strategy, Policy and Equalities
Head of Service	Catrin Roberts, Head of Corporate Support Services: People
Report author	Steve Price, Democratic Services Manager
Title	Review of Polling Districts and Places in Denbighshire

1. What is the report about?

1.1. This report is about a review of polling districts and places within the county of Denbighshire.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1. For Denbighshire County Council to consider the review of polling districts, polling places and polling stations and confirm any changes.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1. That Council is recommended to approve the existing network of polling districts, polling places and polling stations as set out in appendix 1, subject to recommendation 3.2 below.

3.2. In respect of the Tremeirchion electoral ward, that Council is recommended to support the Returning Officer's response to the representations made in appendix 2 for the combining for parliamentary elections of the 3 polling stations into a single polling station for polling districts BKB, BKC and BKD located within Waen Parish Hall.

4. Report details

4.1. The Council has a statutory duty to review its polling districts and polling places at least once every five years. The Council's aim is to ensure that:

- It maintains a network of polling districts, polling places and polling stations.
- The network has enough facilities to make it easy for people to go out and vote whenever there is a local or national election.
- Polling places are accessible to people with disabilities, as far as practicable.
- Any proposed changes to the current polling districts and polling places should be able to demonstrate wide support within the polling district.

4.2. A **polling district** is a geographical area created by the sub-division of an electoral area, i.e., a constituency, district ward or division into smaller parts. A **polling place** is a building or area in which polling stations will be located. A **polling station** is the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place.

4.3. Public comments on the current or suggested polling districts, places and stations were invited during November and December 2024. For guidance, it was recommended that suggestions for changes to polling places should consider the following points:

- Is it big enough to accommodate the number of electors (registered voters) allocated?
- Is it in as central a location as possible for the polling district it serves?
- Will there be long term guaranteed use of the polling place?
- Will it, as far as practicable, be accessible to people with disabilities?

4.4. Representations, if possible, were encouraged to include suggested alternative premises which may be used for polling purposes within the same polling district. The questions respondents were asked to consider were as follows, with additional sections available for comments:

1) I find the location of this polling place (suitable / unsuitable / not sure)

2) Is the polling place easy to locate? (yes / no / don't know)

3) Do you think that the building itself is suitable for use as a polling place? (yes / no / don't know)

4) Is the polling station (the room or area within the polling place where voting takes place) easily accessible? (yes / no / don't know)

5) Is the polling station fully accessible for disabled, elderly or infirm voters to use? (yes / no / don't know)

6) Do you know of alternative, suitable polling places? (yes / no)

7) If you have any comments relating to the polling district (a polling district is a geographical area created by the sub-division of an electoral area, e.g., a constituency into smaller parts) please state.

4.5. Appendix 1 contains the details of the existing network of polling districts and places and identifies the recent changes to the polling network. Appendix 2 contains the responses to the survey which largely supported the current polling arrangements.

4.6. However, appendix 2 also contains representations made by the Acting Returning Officer for the Clwyd East Parliamentary Constituency in respect of the polling arrangements in the Tremeirchion electoral ward. Council is recommended to support the Returning Officer's response to the representations made for the combination of the 3 polling stations located within Waen Parish Hall for parliamentary elections into a single polling station.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Plan 2022 to 2027: The Denbighshire We Want?

5.1. This statutory review is consistent with the Corporate Plan theme of a 'Well-run, high performing Council' and the aim of being close to the communities.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1. There are no additional costs or actions for other services from this report.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

- 7.1. This review is a statutory duty and does not require a Well-being Impact Assessment. The review itself seeks to identify and remedy issues affecting the county's network of polling districts, places and stations, including how accessible they are to people with disabilities.
- 7.2. The number of fully accessible buildings that are in a convenient location for local electors and are available for use as polling stations is limited. The current network contains 67 polling stations across the county, utilising council, community and privately owned buildings within each local area. The Council appreciates the co-operation of the owners of privately owned premises in providing their buildings on election days so that electors have a convenient place to vote.
- 7.3. The assessment of the suitability of polling places and stations is routinely undertaken and does not rely on this statutory review to take place. Experiences from recent elections held in an area, or the potential availability of more suitable premises e.g., that are more accessible or more favourably located, may prompt a change. Occasionally, a previously used building may become unavailable for use as a polling station which will prompt the search for a suitable alternative.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1. The Returning Officer's public notice of this review was published and included on the Council's consultation website pages on the 15 November 2024 providing information on the network of polling districts, places and stations and inviting electors and other interested parties to submit representations. County councillors, the clerks of the city, town and community councils, a range of accessibility and disability access groups and the returning officers of neighbouring authorities with responsibility for certain elections within Denbighshire were included in the consultation.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

9.1. Supportive of the recommendations within the report following the statutory requirement to review polling districts and places. The minor change recommended would result in some staffing savings of a few hundreds of pounds for parliamentary elections, however costs of those elections are re-charged.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

10.1. The availability of accessible and convenient polling places and stations in the right locations across Denbighshire is important to electors and to the Council's administration of local and national elections within the county. In many areas, difficulties can arise in identifying suitable, alternative buildings to replace those no longer deemed suitable or that have been withdrawn from election use by the owners. The Electoral Commission in its guidance to Acting Returning Officers for last year's general election stated that 'ideally, you will have the choice of a range of fully accessible buildings, conveniently located for electors in the area, with owners willing to hire them out for polling station use at low cost. Unfortunately, in practice, this is often not the case and in some areas there may be little choice available'.

10.2. To address this risk the Election Office's monitoring of the county's polling station network continues throughout the year and changes may be made whenever necessary. The Election Office will consider suggestions for changes or improvements to the polling arrangements throughout a year.

11. Power to make the decision

11.1. Section 18C of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (inserted by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013) requires local authorities to undertake a review of the polling districts and polling places in its area every 5 years.